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**BOOK REVIEW**

**ARABS AND YOUNG TURKS: OTTOMANISM, ARABISM AND ISLAMISM IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1908-1918** by Hasan Kayalı, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1997, pp. 291.

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This monograph is a timely addition to scholarly research on a topic of great concern and fascination. Indeed, in the light of the recent explosion of interest in the Ottoman Empire, the study will constitute an invaluable source book. The Young Turk era (1908-1918) has long been considered a crucial stage in modern Balkan and Middle Eastern history. Not only did it comprise the Ottoman Empire's defeat in the Balkan and the First World Wars, it was also, according to some interpretations, the development period of Turkish and Arab nationalism. Historians writing on the origin of Arab nationalism in the late Ottoman period can be divided into two groups. One view claims that Arab nationalism emerged during the Second Constitutional period (1908-1914) as a reaction to attempts to Turkify the Empire's non-Turkish population. The other view argues that Arab nationalism, as a movement for Arab independence, did not exist before the First World War, but that a tendency, termed Arabism, did promote Arab interests.

According to the second standpoint, the idea of Arabism appeared at the turn of the twentieth century among Arabs from the modernist wing of the Moslem religious establishment rather than in the 1870s and 1880s among Arab Christian intellectuals. The movement of Arab nationalism was the result of a conflict within the Arab élite involving upper class Syrians, principally from Damascus. Those who held positions in the Ottoman government remained loyal to the Empire until it collapsed during the First World War; those who were denied posts, especially after the Young Turk revolution of 1908, adopted Arabism as a mechanism for expressing their competition with their fellow Arab élites and disaffection with the Ottoman system. It is put forward by this group that before the breakdown of Ottoman rule in 1918, the vast majority of the Arab élite, although increasingly interested in a relaxation of Turkish authority, preferred to remain within the Ottoman Empire; only a small minority actually entertained the thought of establishing an independent Arab state.

A corollary of above stance is that there was no Turkification policy. Kayalı's work refines and extends this interpretation by asserting that the Sublime Porte's enunciation of an Islamist policy that emphasised the religious bonds between Turks and Arabs defused the Arabist tendency. Most inquiries into the question of the degree to which the policies of the Young Turks intensified sentiments of Arabism among the Arab inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire have been undertaken from the Arab perspective and have had as an underlying concern the search for the presence-or absence-of a unifying Arab ideology. Very few studies have been undertaken from the Ottoman government's perspective. The publication of *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, with its explicit focus on the Arab policy of the

Committee of Union and Progress, is therefore most welcome.

The book consists of six closely integrated chapters, whose subject matter can be summarised as follows. Few traces of Arab separatism are to be found during the era of Administrative Reorganisation (1839-1876) and the reign of Sultan Abdül Hamit II (1876-1909). Arab deputies to the Ottoman Parliament of 1877-1878 were loyal to the Empire. Arab participants in the Young Turk movement of the 1890s, who sought to restore the 1876 Constitution, co-operated with the Turks, Albanians and Armenians in a common endeavour. Not long after the constitutional restoration of 1908, however, the Committee of Union and Progress, the leading organisation in the constitutional movement, began to alienate Arab supporters. Kayal› rejects the claim that this schism arose because of a drive to Turkify the Empire's diverse population. Instead he argues that the Committee of Union and Progress dismissed some Arabs from administrative positions in order to get rid of incompetent officials and supporters of the ancien régime and he maintains that the implementation of long-neglected legislation stipulating the use of Turkish in courts was not an attack on Arabic, but an effort to establish uniform judicial procedures.

It is the author's principal contention that it is incorrect to equate centralisation with Turkification. In a careful review of the government's language and educational policies, Kayal› demonstrates that these were consistent with long-standing practices and did not represent an attempt to achieve Turkish linguistic or political domination. Moreover, he tries to show that the Committee of Union and Progress governments were responsive to developments in the Arab provinces and displayed a willingness to modify policies to accommodate certain Arab grievances. Kayal› suggests that disgruntled Arab leaders invented the notion of a Turkification policy as a rhetorical weapon in their contest for influence with the Committee of Union and Progress. His argument that charges against the Committee of Union and Progress pursuing a Turkification policy were unfounded is fair and reasonable.

Kayal› describes how Arab efforts to establish a decentralised imperial structure briefly threatened the Committee of Union and Progress's centralist policy. He writes that the Committee of Union and Progress overcame the de-centralist movement with its January 1913 coup d'état, concessions to Arab political leaders and its Islamist policy. He points out the evolving nature of Ottomanism and suggests that the Young Turks turned to Islamism rather than Turkish nationalism when Ottomanism failed. By 1914, Kayal› notes, the Committee of Union and Progress was launching an Islamist programme and had compromised with the Arabists and the de-centralists. This argument is valid but is less thoroughly treated than his other themes. An excellent chapter on the policy towards the district of Hijaz between 1908 and 1914 vividly depicts political rivalry among Mecca's Sherif Hussein, Ottoman governors in Medina and various Arabian potentates. Kayal› suggests that the autonomy of Sherif Hussein in Mecca has been exaggerated. Instead of treating the Sherif as an independent actor, he shows how the government controlled him and mentions the Ottoman context of the Hussein-McMahon correspondence on the rebellion in the Hijaz. The author's findings reinforce the view that, before the First World War, Hussein strove to secure his position in the Hijaz; he was not an Arab nationalist.

Kayal›'s absorbing book may not have to put to rest the traditional debates over the origin of Arab nationalism, but he has cast these and other important issues in a fresh and interesting light. The book is also commendable for bringing new evidence to bear on old arguments, but it will not be the last word. This stimulating work, a mine of information and useful references and one of the most comprehensive and up-to-date sources on the subject, provides plenty of food for thought and its major themes will be intensively discussed for many years to come.

Kayal's intelligent research is extensive and current. He uses Ottoman government documents, parliamentary records, Istanbul newspapers and European diplomatic reports as well as a broad range of Turkish and Arabic secondary materials to examine Ottoman policy towards Arab provinces. The book includes copious footnotes, a useful bibliography and a detailed index, all of which enhance its value. My only criticism of this impressive volume is that, while its technical execution is sound, more careful editing might have reduced, substantially, the number of times this reviewer had to re-read sentences to gain clarity. This minor complaint aside, Kayal's survey is a model monograph, tightly organised, densely written, and with a lot of evidence culled from both printed and unpublished primary sources. The analysis is thorough and meticulous, and the judgements are well grounded.

The author has made a significant contribution to understanding Turco-Arab relations in the first two decades of the twentieth century and to nationality conflicts in the Ottoman Empire more generally. This first-rate piece of erudition, outgrowth of work at Harvard University, should be of considerable value to specialists in Ottoman political history or working on the history of Turco-Arab relations. It will have a solid place in the literatures of those fields for some time to come. Not all scholars share Kayal's opinion of the Young Turks, but most would agree that it merits serious attention.

Kayal's book is one that savants will want to consult in order to grasp one of the major issues that confronted Ottoman statesmen during the last ten years of the Empire. A close reading of this sophisticated study will prove richly rewarding for the historian of the modern Middle East. The author is, thus, to be congratulated for a notable achievement. It is also to be hoped that the book's project will arouse more interest in the Ottoman Empire and be a stimulus to further enterprises.

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